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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the impact of the Texas Teacher Appraisal System (TTAS) through an analysis of interviews with 24 high school English teachers. The first part of the paper discusses the development of the TTAS and the second section describes the study. The teachers were asked if and how the TTAS had affected their teaching performance, what were positive and negative aspects of the system, how they would change the present system, and what would constitute an ideal system. Responses revealed that: (1) all but one of the subjects indicated that the TTAS had affected their teaching performance during evaluation; (2) more than a third of the subjects indicated that the TTAS had caused them to reflect on their teaching; (3) the most frequently mentioned negative aspect of the TTAS was that teaching performance could be staged or rehearsed for evaluators, also that too much depends on the relationship between the teacher and the evaluator; (4) the subjects indicated that evaluation should not be tied to monetary gain, observations should be unannounced, and evaluation should be based on more than classroom observation; and (5) a majority of the teachers believed the purpose of an ideal evaluation system should be individual growth or professional development. To correct what teachers perceive to be problems with the TTAS would require a shift from a summative to a formative evaluation emphasis. (JD)

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DOGS, PONIES, AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHING: ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE TEXAS TEACHER APPRAISAL SYSTEM

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> [A]ny evaluation system must be perceived to be fair by the majority of those subjected to it. Otherwise it is doomed to failure - even if only in the ill will it creates.
>
> Carl Parker (1988)
> Texas Senator

In 1984 the Texas Legislature required the development of teacher appraisal criteria "based on observable, job-related behavior" (TEA, 1984, p. 10) in order that all teachers might "be evaluated in the same manner and under the same criteria" (TEA, 1984, p. 11). The legislators' intent was to develop an avenue for "the purpose of remediation and improvement" (TEA, 1984, p. 11) and, at the same time, place teachers along a career ladder for contract renewal and salary decisions. Thus, improving the general quality of classroom teaching and rewarding exceptional quality in teaching were to be accomplished through a summative evaluation applicable to all teachers in all teaching situations.

In this paper we will explore the impact of the Texas Teacher Appraisal System (hereafter referred to as TTAS) through an analysis of senior high school English teachers' responses to a series of questions on the TTAS and on

teacher evaluation in general. The data reported here are intended to compliment similar data to be reported by Peterson and Comeaux in this symposium, thus providing a tri-state comparison of teacher assessment systems. In the first part of this paper we discuss the development of the TTAS. The second section of the paper will describe our study, followed by a third section in which we discuss the implications of this study for further research into and development of teacher appraisals.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEXAS TEACHER APPRAISAL SYSTEM

Based on the advice of a panel of experts and on a review of the literature on teaching effectiveness, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) developed an appraisal instrument to meet the requirements specified by the legislation. Thus, the TTAS is grounded in the body of process product research and is oriented toward a direct instructional model (for an extensive review of this research see Brophy and Good, 1986, and Rosenshine and Stevens, 1986). Six assumptions underlying development of the TTAS are summarized below (TEA, 1984):

a. Teaching is an intentional act.

b. There are generic teaching behaviors which can form a basis for evaluation.

c. More effective teachers will demonstrate a greater number of these behaviors than less effective teachers.

d. While student academic growth is the primary goal of Texas public schools, there are additional student development goals. As a result, appropriate teaching behaviors may vary according to the goals of the lesson.

e. An observer will see what a teacher is capable of doing, not necessarily what he/she usually does. Therefore, more accurate appraisal will be gained by using multiple appraisers and multiple sources of information.

Barnes' (1987) account of the development process reported that a job-relatedness survey was conducted among a stratified random sample of teachers. These teachers responded to potential items for the instrument in terms of observability, importance, and frequency of use. According to Barnes and Dodds (1986), this survey provided confirmation that the content of the TTAS was representative of the nature of teaching. One group that was over-represented in the sample were English/language arts teachers.

Barnes (1987) also reported that Spring 1987 appraisal records of 2,261 teachers in seven school districts supported both the organization and composition of the instrument, as well as its generalizability as a measure of teaching performance. This was not confirmed by White (1987) in a study of scores of 1,592 teachers in five school districts. He contended that the TTAS scores did not generate data to support reliability of scores or criterion validity of the instrument. He concluded that because TTAS is a check list and most teachers in his study had been given a check for all or most of the items on the instrument, there was not enough variance in scores to be used in a summative evaluation of teacher performance that leads to decisions about merit pay, teaching competence, or teaching excellence. He did find TTAS acceptable as a formative evaluation to help teachers improve their teaching performance. However, the absence of baseline data about the quality of teaching before implementation of TTAS makes measurement of improvement of instruction problematical.

In addition to questions of reliability and validity, there are questions of the positive and negative impact of the TTAS on teacher behavior and on teacher morale. Although anecdotes regarding the negative impact of the TTAS

abound, there has been little systematic inquiry into teachers' perceptions of the impact of TTAS. Recalling that one of the stated purposes of the appraisal system was to improve teaching, teachers' acceptance of the behaviors prescribed by the instrument and subsequent modifications of their own teaching are, presumably, an important first step in determining whether or not the TTAS has any effect on student learning. If implementation of the TTAS has only generated unproductive tension among teachers and administrators and has not affected teaching behavior (except on those days when an evaluator is present), policymakers would be well advised to explore other means for improving teaching and learning.

METHODS

Subjects

Six English teachers from each of two senior high schools in two adjacent metropolitan school districts agreed to participate in the interviews. One of the schools contained a magnet school within the larger campus, thus three of the teachers were selected from the magnet school and three from the non-magnet school. Eighteen of the

twenty-four teachers had more than three years of teaching experience.

Procedure

The project coordinator contacted selected school districts to seek initial approval and cooperation for this study. Each district identified two high schools to participate in the study and designated a contact person, either the principal or dean of instruction, within each school to arrange the interviews. The building contact person then identified subjects and obtained their permission to be interviewed.

This study, an extension of a study on teacher assessment being conducted in Florida and Wisconsin (Peterson and Comeaux, 1989), utilized a semistructured interview technique. An interview protocol was provided with specific questions to be asked of all subjects, but the interviewers were able to use their own judgment in deciding how and when to probe for deeper explanations. Interviews were conducted in different locations throughout the school buildings, but all interviews were private. Before the interview began, the interviewer explained the study and the subject signed a consent form. Permission was

asked to tape record the interview. In one school, all subjects declined to have their interviews tape recorded. They had agreed among themselves that they would not participate in the study if their interviews were tape recorded. Despite assurances that interview data would remain confidential, they expressed fear that information would reach campus or central administrators. Therefore, each of these six interviews was recorded by hand. Field notes were taken to provide additional information on each interview. Additional field notes recorded information on the school setting and contacts with other school personnel.

Data Analysis

Teachers' perceptions of TTAS were determined by coding and categorizing their answers to specific questions about the evaluation system. They were asked if and how TTAS had affected their teaching performance, for positive and negative aspects of the system, what they felt should be the purpose of evaluation, how they would change the present system, and what would constitute an ideal system. In addition, teachers were asked about their perceptions of two alternative evaluation systems. Although the basic categories were predetermined, others which emerged from the

analysis were added. Comparisons were then made between beginning and experienced teachers, between individual schools, and across school districts. In addition, a separate, holistic analysis was conducted by re-reading interview transcripts to identify representative statements, verify patterns of responses across categories, and to gain further insight into the meanings of those patterns.

RESULTS

Affect on Teaching Performance

In response to the question, "Has the district's evaluation policy affected your teaching in any way? If so, how?", 21 (88%) of the teachers stated that the TTAS had affected their teaching performance (Table 1).

Table 1

PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS' RESPONSES TO QUESTION, "HAS TTAS AFFECTED YOUR TEACHING IN ANY WAY?"

YES: N = 21 88%				NO: N = 3 12%	
Urban District 83%		Near Urban District 92%		Urban District 17%	Near Urban District 8%
Eastview	100%	O'Neill	100%	Jeff.Mag. 66%	Rosewood 17%
Jefferson	100%	Rosewood	83%		
Jeff.Mag.	33%				

Statements taken from the interview transcripts provide additional insight as to how this finding might be interpreted. One teacher from Eastview High School stated that TTAS affected her teaching "just on the day I am evaluated." The same teacher, however, also said that TTAS "keeps us on our toes." In another illustration, an experienced teacher at O'Neill High School said that TTAS affected her teaching only during the week she knew she would be evaluated. However, in answer to a subsequent question in which she was asked for positive aspects of TTAS, the same teacher replied, " I think it has made me more aware of my performance in the classroom and perhaps

made me try to do more of a variety of things within one class period."

Of the three teachers who said TTAS had not affected their teaching performance, two were experienced teachers in Jefferson Magnet School and one was a beginning teacher in Rosewood. After saying that TTAS had not affected their teaching, two of these three teachers made subsequent statements which indicated that this might not be the case. One of the magnet school teachers said she was nervous during evaluation; the Rosewood teacher said she used specific challenge statements an evaluator told her were acceptable for earning credit for that indicator. In other words, all but one of the subjects indicated at some point during their interview that TTAS had affected their teaching performance in some manner. This was by far the strongest finding in the study.

Positive Aspects of TTAS

Table 2 shows what the teachers perceived to be positive aspects of the TTAS.

Table 2

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF TTAS

Total of all teachers for each response	% of total response by district and school			
N = 7 29%	TTAS encourages a teacher to reflect on his/her teaching.			
	Urban	43%	Near Urban	57%
	Eastview	29%	O'Neill	43%
	Jefferson	14%	Rosewood	14%
N = 7 29%	TTAS reveals what a teacher needs to do to improve his/her teaching.			
	Urban	71%	Near Urban	29%
	Eastview	43%	O'Neill	14%
	Jefferson	29%	Rosewood	14%
N = 4 17%	TTAS gets the administrator into the classroom to see what is going on.			
	Urban	75%	Near Urban	25%
	Eastview	25%	Rosewood	25%
	Jeff.Magnet	50%		

The holistic analysis indicated that at some point in the interview, more than a third of the subjects, either in discussing how TTAS had affected their teaching or in identifying positive aspects of the system, indicated that TTAS had caused them to reflect on their teaching. A statement by an experienced teacher in Near Urban District is representative of the feelings expressed by teachers who said TTAS caused them to reflect on their teaching. She said, "It has really caused us to look at the way we teach. I'm not saying it has improved teaching that much. But it has caused us to look at the way we do teach."

Fourteen teachers (58%) said TTAS affected their teaching because it made them focus on specific teaching behaviors they needed to perform. In every instance where a particular teaching behavior was mentioned as an example of how TTAS affected teaching, it was one of the generic teaching behaviors used as an indicator on the TTAS instrument (TEA, 1984). Statements such as, "[I] make sure I do have a very clearly defined objective" and "I think it's helped me to identify what a good lesson should consist of" suggest that the greatest impact of the TTAS has been to focus teachers' attention on the generic teaching behaviors

identified by the process/product research in which TTAS is grounded. None of the teachers from either district made any statements which indicated that they believed TTAS had affected the transmission of content.

Four teachers (17%) said a positive aspect of TTAS was that it got administrators into the classroom to see what was going on. In addition to the results shown in Table 2, five (20%) of the subjects identified four other positive aspects of TTAS. Because there was no pattern to the responses, they are not discussed.

Negative Aspects of the TTAS

Teachers' identifications of the negative aspects of the TTAS are provided in Table 3.

Table 3

NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF THE TTAS

Total of all teachers for each response	% of total response by district and school			
N = 7 29%	Teaching performance can be staged or rehearsed.			
	Urban	71%	Near Urban	29%
	Eastview	43%	O'Neill	28%
	Jeff.Magnet	28%		
N = 4 17%	Form is too long; too many behaviors expected for one lesson.			
	Urban	50%	Near Urban	50%
	Eastview	25%	O'Neill	25%
	Jeff.Magnet	25%	Rosewood	25%
N = 4 17%	Too subjective; too much depends on relationship between evaluator and subject.			
	Urban	75%	Near Urban	25%
	Eastview	25%	Rosewood	25%
	Jefferson	25%		
	Jeff.Magnet	25%		
N = 4 17%	Evaluators may lack subject matter or pedagogical knowledge.			
	Urban	100%	Near Urban	0
	Eastview	25%		
	Jefferson	25%		
	Jeff.Magnet	50%		

The most frequently mentioned negative aspect of TTAS was that teaching performance could be staged or rehearsed. Seven subjects (29%) mentioned this. One teacher told us, "A lot of teachers put on a show. The kids know. The teachers rehearse them...But I am counted down for integrity...These people who are putting on shows, getting money, rehearse two or three days. Some of them give bonus points. The administrators may not know, but we do. We hear. Kids talk." Another teacher we interviewed maintained that she did not rehearse her students, but she did prepare two sets of lesson plans covering the same content for the week in which she would be evaluated. The second set was "packed" with behaviors and activities to cover all TTAS indicators.

Three negative aspects of TTAS were each mentioned by four teachers (17%). These were that the form is too long, the form is too subjective or too much depends on the relationship between the evaluator and the teacher, and the evaluators lack subject matter or pedagogical knowledge. The idea that teachers may think the TTAS instrument is too long is reinforced by responses to a question asking for positive aspects of one of the alternative evaluation systems. Half of the subjects said one of the advantages of

that system was that it was not too long or was shorter than the Texas instrument.

In addition to these frequently mentioned negative aspects of the TTAS, 84% of the subjects mentioned nine other negative aspects. There was no strong pattern to those responses; therefore, they are not discussed in this paper.

Recommendations for Change

Table 4 indicates changes teachers believed should be made in the present appraisal system.

Table 4

TEACHERS' RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGES IN PRESENT EVALUATION SYSTEM

Total of all teachers for each response	% of total response by district and school			
N = 8 33%	Evaluation should not be tied to monetary gain.			
	Urban	12%	Near Urban	88%
	Jeff.Magnet	12%	O'Neill	63%
			Rosewood	25%
N = 4 17%	Observations should be unannounced.			
	Urban	100%	Near Urban	0
	Eastview	25%		
	Jefferson	25%		
	Jeff.Magnet	50%		
N = 4 17%	Evaluation should be based on more than classroom observation.			
	Urban	50%	Near Urban	50%
	Jeff.Magnet	50%	O'Neill	25%
			Rosewood	25%

Eight teachers (33%) said appraisal should not be tied to monetary gain. Seven of these teachers were in Near Urban District. Many teachers in this district also expressed the belief that there were quotas set by the

district due to a shortage of funds for putting all qualified teachers on the career ladder. Four subjects (17%) thought all observations should be unannounced because the evaluator would be more likely to get a true picture of what went on in the classroom. An additional four teachers (17%) recommended including more in a teacher's evaluation than classroom observations. Eight other changes were recommended; these are not discussed because they were mentioned by only one or two teachers. Two teachers (8%) thought there should be no changes.

Description of Ideal Evaluation System

Table 5 shows teachers' responses to questions asking them to describe an ideal evaluation system.

Table 5

TEACHERS' DESCRIPTIONS OF AN IDEAL EVALUATION SYSTEM

Total of all teachers for each response	% of total response by district and school			
N = 19 79%	Purpose of an ideal evaluation system should be individual growth and professional development.			
	Urban	42%	Near Urban	58%
	Eastview	26%	O'Neill	32%
	Jefferson	5%	Rosewood	26%
	Jeff.Magnet	11%		
N = 13 54%	There should be different evaluation systems for beginning and experienced teachers.			
	Urban	69%	Near Urban	31%
	Eastview	31%	O'Neill	23%
	Jefferson	23%	Rosewood	8%
	Jeff.Magnet	15%		
N = 9 38%	Teachers should be evaluated by someone with expertise in their content area.			
	Urban	55%	Near Urban	45%
	Eastview	22%	O'Neill	11%
	Jefferson	11%	Rosewood	33%
	Jeff.Magnet	22%		

Nineteen teachers (79%) believed the purpose of an ideal evaluation system should be individual growth or

professional development. One teacher stated her ideas about the purpose of an ideal system with a textbook-like definition: "The purpose of any evaluation should be twofold: One, to give praise where praise is due, and, two, to constructively criticize so improvements can be made." Other teachers made more succinct statements such as, "To improve performance," and "Improvement. Teacher improvement."

Thirteen teachers (54%) believed there should be different evaluation systems for beginning and experienced teachers. Nine (38%) said that evaluators should be aware of inexperience and not expect as much as they do from an experienced teacher. Three (13%) said inexperienced teachers should be evaluated more often than experienced teachers. One teacher said there should be a different system for beginning and experienced teachers but he didn't know how it should be different.

Nine teachers (38%) stated that appraisals should be conducted by someone with expertise in their content area. Eighteen (75%) named particular persons or teams for conducting the evaluations. These included department chairperson, peers, outside team, and teams from within that included a department chairperson or department

representative. In some cases, subjects said they included these persons because of their content knowledge. In other cases, where it was not specifically stated that these persons were included because of content knowledge, it can nevertheless be assumed that they would have such knowledge.

DISCUSSION

Peck and Tucker's (1973) review of research on teacher education documented convincingly that teachers can be trained to execute recommended teaching behaviors. Gage's (1983) review of experimental studies of effective teaching behaviors confirms that such training does not need to be labor intensive or expensive. The results of the present study suggest that teachers who know they will be evaluated on a given set of behaviors feel that they can execute those behaviors, although those behaviors tend to be produced on demand. This conclusion is consistent with the wording of the TTAS manual itself, "...the observers will be seeing the teacher exhibit what he or she can do, not necessarily what the teacher usually does when an appraiser is not in the classroom" (TEA, 1984, p. 6).

To the degree that the English teachers in this study are representative of other teachers, implementation of the

TTAS may be said to have accomplished its goal. The question of whether implementation has resulted in improved instruction, however, cannot be answered. The teachers in our study did not necessarily equate their ability to execute specified teaching behaviors with improved instruction. Several of the teachers were openly contemptuous of the entire evaluation effort; most were concerned about the evaluation procedures rather than the effects of the evaluation on students' learning.

In light of Kurtz and Weitman's (1988) conclusion that the TTAS domains are not representative of what teachers feel to be significant aspects of their teaching, it is important to examine carefully our teachers' statements regarding the positive impact of the TTAS and also to note what is missing from those comments.

The most frequently mentioned positive effect of the TTAS was that thinking about the evaluation caused individual teachers to reflect on their teaching, to re-examine actions they had previously taken for granted. In some cases, the teachers' original practices were confirmed; in other cases, behaviors were changed. The teachers never asserted they had noticed any difference in their students' learning or in their behavior. From this we

infer that the content of the teachers' reflection was more oriented to an examination of skills, what Schon (1983) and others have labeled a technical approach to teaching. If this is true, the outcome of reflection is more likely to be self-oriented ("How am I doing?"), as opposed to student-oriented ("How are they doing?"). We feel that the latter is preferable if the improvement of learning is desired.

Of course, if the fact that simply increasing the execution of desired generic teaching behaviors automatically results in improved student learning, the increased reflection on "How am I doing?" may not be problematic. If (however unlikely) this is true, then it would follow that the TTAS should be used to enable teachers to improve their ability to execute the desired behaviors. White (1987) argued in favor of the TTAS as a formative instrument because a check list (the behaviors are or are not present) is acceptable to help teachers improve their performance.

The teachers in our sample, as well as the teachers surveyed by Kurtz and Weitman (1988), believed the TTAS is summative. Furthermore, they believed that different evaluators assessed the same teachers very differently.

They spoke of "good" or "hard" or "unfair" evaluators and gave examples which suggested that one's evaluator had considerable impact on how one perceived the evaluation itself. In some schools (recall the teachers who refused to be audiotaped) a climate of fear prevailed - hardly a climate for encouraging teachers to seek help in improving their teaching. On the other hand, in a school where the teachers shared a primary evaluator whom they respected for her knowledge of both content and teaching and who was considered fair, the teachers as a group were less threatened by the process than those in other schools. A recent stydy by Swank, Bower, and Crawford (1989) confirms that the largest proportion of variance in teachers' ratings on the TTAS can be predicted by the campus on which they teach. The researchers propose that the difference between campuses occurs not because of the teachers, but because of the raters. In an analysis of the TTAS now in progress, this hypothesis, as well as other issues of validity and reliability, will be tested (Crawford, 1988).

The English teachers we interviewed were very positive about the prospect of formative evaluation. In their descriptions of an ideal evaluation system, our teachers said it should be for improvement of teaching. A number

recommended peer evaluation as an avenue for improvement. One suggested that formative peer evaluation might lead to improved teaching for the observer as well as the teacher being observed. She believed that observing different methods and teaching styles would be enlightening for the observer. A representative comment illustrates our teachers' feelings about formative evaluation:

> Ideally, we would be evaluated by master teachers in our field. They know what we are up against, what we are dealing with, and the type of methodologies and instructional skills that work for that particular subject.

From this we may infer that teachers believe that expertise in the content area should be included as an indicator of teaching effectiveness. Though the teachers did not use the words "content pedagogy," they appeared to sense the need to include what Shulman (1986) calls the missing paradigm when he contends that we need to properly blend the two aspects of a teacher's capacities by paying as much attention to the content of teaching as to the elements of the teaching process. These teachers seem to want an evaluator capable of using TTAS, a generic evaluation system, to identify and assess teaching of content in the manner described by Piazza and Wallat (1987) in their

exploration of the use of such an instrument to evaluate a writing lesson.

To correct what teachers perceive to be problems with the TTAS would require fundamental changes in the evaluation system, with a shift from a summative to a formative emphasis. It would also require fundamental changes in the relationships between policymakers, educational bureaucrats, teachers, and administrators. The Legislature requires teachers to be evaluated on common teaching behaviors; the teachers believe content pedagogy must be taken into account. The appraisal system defines effective teaching in terms of quality and number of generic teaching behaviors exhibited; the teachers do not believe that is an adequate definition of good teaching. The appraisal system provides a narrow focus for evaluation; the teachers do not find that acceptable. The appraisal system is intended to encourage professional growth and improve instruction, as well as distinguish among the performances of teachers; the teachers do not believe the instrument or the evaluators have performed either function fairly in many cases. Unless teachers' criticisms are taken into account, and they are more fully involved in a formative evaluation process, the

TTHS will continue to be a demonstration of expected behaviors, what the teachers consider a dog and pony show.

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